News From the Wyoming Department of Health

Monday, May 8, 2006

Wyoming on the Right Track for Children's Mental Health

May is Mental Health Month

As the Wyoming Department of Health's Mental Health Division marks Mental Health Month with an emphasis this week on children, new national data shows Wyoming is on the right track as a "system of care" is developed to benefit children and youth with serious mental health needs.

A system of care for children's mental health is a coordinated network of community-based services organized to serve children and youth with serious mental health needs. "Youth and their families work in partnership with public and private organizations to find the best way to meet the critical needs these children have," said Susie Markus, Child Mental Health Initiative project director for the Wyoming Department of Health.

National data released today by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) show children and youth in systems of care spend less time in inpatient care, experience fewer arrests, make improvements in their overall mental health and do better in school than before enrollment.

Systems of care also save taxpayers money when compared to traditional mental health service delivery systems. According to the national average, systems of care save public health systems \$2,776.85 per child in inpatient costs over the course of a year, and save juvenile justice systems \$784.16 per child within the same time frame.

Markus said Wyoming spent approximately \$12 million in 2005 on out-of-home placements for children with mental health needs and about 20 percent of all youths in the juvenile justice system have an identified mental health issue.

Wyoming was awarded a \$9 million, six-year grant last fall to develop a system of care for children's mental health in Wyoming. The Child Mental Health Initiative proposal involves collaboration among several agencies serving Wyoming children.

"There is no question we have serious needs related to children's mental health in this state," Markus said. "We're working to serve these young people more effectively."

Masks painted by Wyoming children to reflect the topic of feelings are being displayed through Friday in the breezeway between the Wyoming Capitol and the Herschler Building in Cheyenne as Mental Health Month continues.

####